

This compilation of most frequently asked questions concerning on-site sewage disposal systems has been developed by the Placer County Division of Environmental Health as part of an effort to provide information to the public about use and abuse of septic systems.

Will additives improve the efficiency of my septic tank?

A: Four groups of additives about which inquires are generally made are:

- 1. Substances introduced into the system to increase microbial action, e.g. yeast;
- 2. Food product to increase microbial growth and action, e.g. hamburger;
- 3. Products intended to dissolve in the septic tank. These substances may raise the pH of effluent in the tank and deactivate or kill microorganisms; e.g., lye
- 4. Products to remove scum from the tank walls. The solids removed from the tank may clog the drainlines.

No significant evidence of the effectiveness of these products is known. Actually, in the cases of #3 & #4 damage to the system may occur. The introduction of any additive to the septic tank is discouraged.

Should I use special chemicals (e.g. detergents) or paper products that are considered better for the system?

A: Ordinary household chemicals should not harm the biological balance of the system when used in moderation. Excessive amounts are harmful. The disposal system should be limited to those that are absolutely necessary (e.g. toilet paper) and which fall apart easily when wet.

What kinds of things should never be put into the system?

Any type of poisonous substance, such as motor oil, paint, paint thinner, grease, solvents, pesticides, cigarette butts, strong acids or strong alkalis, paper products that will not readily degrade, such as disposal diapers, sanitary napkins, facial tissues or paper towels.

$\mathbb{Q}^{\circ}_{\circ}$ Will the use of a garbage disposal unit adversely affect the septic system?

A: One should at all times minimize the amount of solids introduced into the septic tank. Avoid using a garbage disposal unit.

What does the accumulation of lush green vegetation over my drain field indicate?

Vegetative growth in the area frequently indicated imminent drain field failure. Damaged leach-line piped or decreased soil porosity can cause effluent to surface. Visual inspection of the area of may reveal an odorous accumulation of sewage. Dye testing of the system can be helpful in determining if any liquid observed originated from the septic tank.

Q^a In order to reduce the load on my septic system, can I divert my wastewater from my washing machine or other grey water fixtures?

All wastewater must be discharged into an approved sewage disposal system. To do otherwise would be inconsistent with and in violation of the Placer County Code and State law. Even "grey water" contains high numbers of bacteria, some of which may cause disease.

What can I do about periodic odors from my roof vents?

Hydrogen sulfide ("rotten egg" odor) is a normal by-product of the sewage digestion process which occurs in the septic tank. Noxious odors from the septic tank may become obvious through roof vents of the house depending upon the house location and prevailing wind currents. To help alleviate the nuisance, extend the roof vents on the house.

How often should my septic tank be pumped?

As Every 3-5 years, depending on how many people use it. Companies who service septic tanks are located in the *Yellow Pages*.

OHow can I inspect my septic tank myself?

The easiest way to gain information on the condition of the tank is to hire a professional experienced with septic systems. To inspect the tank, remove the manhole cover at the inlet end. It is most thorough to check both the scum and sludge levels, but checking only the scum layer will give you a good idea if the tank needs pumping or not. Usually these tanks have a 6-foot liquid depth. Use caution to avoid falling in the tank. Do not light a match near an open tank or inhale significant amounts of noxious fumes liberated. Standing on the tank or surrounding soil, use a shovel and push the scum layer away from the side of the tank so that you can estimate its thickness. If the thickness of the scum layer is a foot or more, arrange to have your tank pumped immediately. Replace the manhole cover and thoroughly wash the shovel and hands. The disease-causing bacteria found

in the septic tank can be hazardous to your health if ingested. Good person hygiene after this type of contact is critical.

If your system has inspection pipes at the end of the leach lines, they can be checked for pooling of liquid. Accumulation of water in the leach line is an early indication of problems.

1 I have an alternating drain field system. How often should I alternate my leach lines?

A: Every 6 to 12 months. This gives the unused leach lines a time to "rest", thereby increasing the life of the system. Be sure to rotate the valve back again after the 6 to 12 month resting period.

Why does my plumbing seem to become sluggish during winter months or when there is increased household water use?

Both wet weather, which increases the amount of water introduced into leach field area soil, and increased household water use can cause a system to become overloaded. System failure may become evident during this period of saturation. Clogged or slow-moving plumbing is frequently the result of a failing system. Blockages in the distribution pipe may be removable, but if the failure is caused by a clogged soil that will no longer accept effluent, then a new absorption system is necessary.

Why does the septic tank need to be cleaned and pumped?

Regular cleaning of the tank is part of a complete preventative maintenance program necessary to the life of the system. Solids must be removed from the tank before they leave the tank and become deposited in and clog the absorption field. After the absorption field is clogged, cleaning the tank is of little benefit.

How can I locate my septic tank?

Some simple methods are to probe for the tank with a metal rod, follow the pipeline from the house or by listening for the noise a plumber's snake makes when it hits the tank. Dig to uncover the manholes on the top of the tank.

Your local Environmental Health Division is available to assist with questions or concerns. If you suspect or detect failure of your system, or plan to repair a system, contact the Environmental Health Division. All new construction or repair work on septic system must be done under permit from the Health Department.